



FWP Region 7
P.O. Box 1630 - Miles City, MT 59301
Ph: (406) 234-0900

December 20, 2019

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE

Re: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks land proposal

Dear Interested Party:

Proposed Project Description

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) will be preparing an Environmental Analysis on a proposal to purchase a perpetual Conservation Easement (CE) totaling 6,751 deeded acres in Wibaux County, Montana. The CE will be funded by Habitat Montana dollars (derived from the sale of hunting licenses) and administered by FWP.

Conservation easements are partnerships between FWP and willing private landowners to conserve important native wildlife habitats and provide public recreational access. The landowners receive financial compensation in exchange for adopting the conservation and public access covenants of the easement while continuing to operate a viable, productive ranching operation. The proposed easement, called the “**W-Bar Easement**,” would provide protection, enhancement, and public access to a unique combination of eastern Montana habitats. One of the unique habitat features is the Beaver Creek riparian zone. This property comprises the largest intact parcel of Beaver Creek from its headwaters to the North Dakota line, encompassing over 11 miles of important riparian habitat along Beaver Creek and over 10 miles along Dry Creek and other tributaries. In addition to the rich riparian habitat, the property is comprised of extensive native prairie uplands interspersed with numerous hardwood draws and shrubby hillsides, providing an exceptional level of habitat and biological diversity.

The proposed CE would conserve and maintain large healthy blocks of native riparian and grassland habitats from conversion to other cover types, benefitting wildlife and livestock production, while also providing for managed public hunting and recreational opportunities. Placing a CE on the property would have no effect on the taxable base of the property. Please see the attached maps for additional information.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of this land project include:

- Provide conservation and enhancement for high-quality eastern Montana native habitats while maintaining traditional land uses—the land would continue to operate as a working cattle ranch.
- Provide public hunting and recreational opportunity in a landscape dominated by private lands.

Public Involvement and Process

The 30-day scoping period will begin on *December 23, 2019*. Please submit either written or e-mailed comments by *January 24, 2020* to:

W-Bar CE Comment
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301

-OR-

bskone@mt.gov
Subject: W-Bar CE Comment

If you have any questions regarding this project or scoping process, please contact:
Brandi Skone, FWP Wildlife Biologist at 406-234-0948 or bskone@mt.gov or
Melissa Foster, FWP Wildlife Biologist at 406-852-2032 or mfoster@mt.gov

Comments received during this scoping period will help FWP determine public interest, identify potential issues that would require further analysis, and may provide insight for refining the proposal or for developing and analyzing additional alternatives. Upon completion of the scoping phase, FWP will determine next steps, which may include conducting an environmental analysis with additional opportunity for public input or taking no further action on the proposed project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Schmitz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brad Schmitz
Region 7 Supervisor

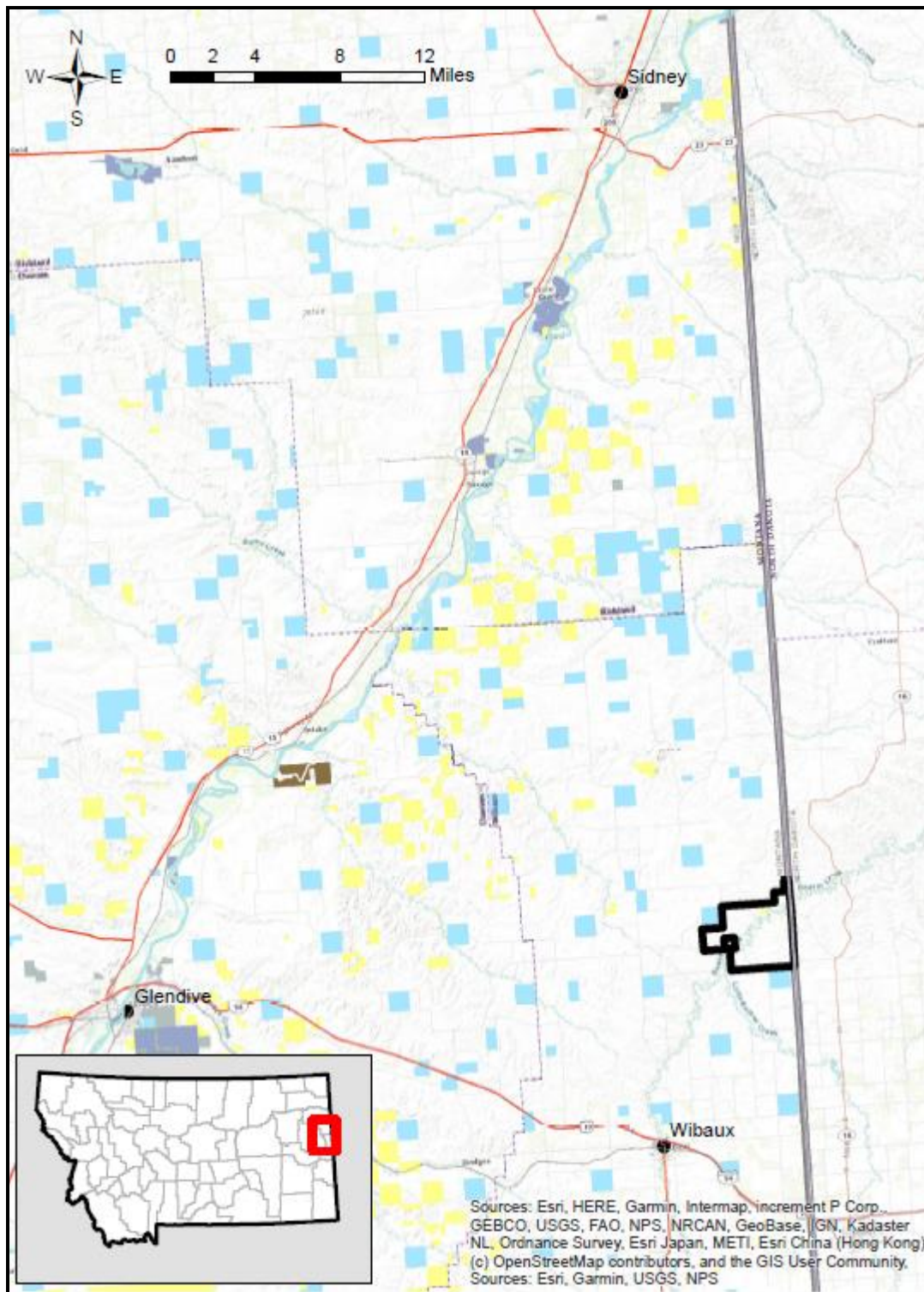


Figure 1. Location of the proposed conservation easement (solid black outline) in Wibaux County, Montana. The inset map shows the extent (red square) of the map and relative location of the easement in Montana.

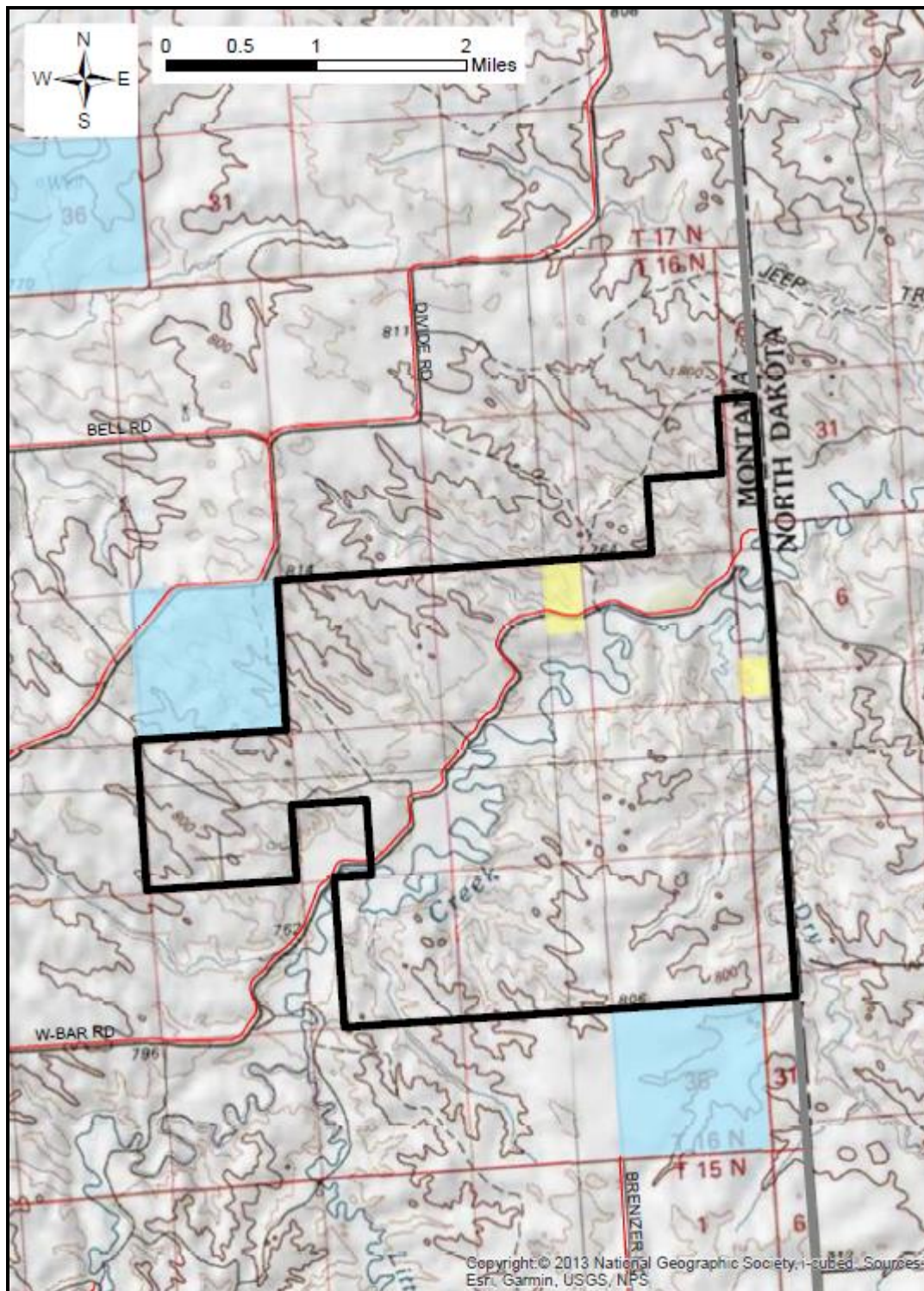


Figure 2. Boundary of the proposed conservation easement (solid black outline). Bureau of Land Management parcels are shown in yellow and State Trust Lands in blue. The easement would encumber only deeded land (shown in white/gray).